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JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN A SMALL CITY.

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Numerous studies have been made of juvenile delinquency and dependency in the cities. The small city and the town have been overlooked. Yet the problems of child development are present in the smaller community, and are even more difficult of solution, because of the survival of the traditional point of view, and because of the absence of the trained social worker. The difficulty is increased rather than diminished by the fact that institutions, such as the Juvenile Court, which were developed to meet city needs, are transferred to the country unmodified with reference to a widely different situation.

The following study is a fragmentary one. Not enough cases are included to give it statistical value for the making of generalizations. But it does have a value as a pioneer attempt to indicate the main facts in the situation of child delinquency and dependency in a small city of 12,000 inhabitants in a rural state. With this end in view a study² was made of juvenile delinquents and dependents for a two-year period beginning May 1, 1912, and ending April 30, 1914. During this time fifty-two children were brought into the Juvenile Court.

The facts of age, sex and race stood out at once. The majority of the children were in the age group from eleven to sixteen. There were only twelve children between the ages of five and ten, and but six boys and girls under five years. Thirty-two boys and but twenty girls were brought before the juvenile judge. The proportion of delinquency was higher among the colored than among the white children.

A detailed analysis of the less obvious facts such as residence, nature of delinquency, and disposition of the cases will lead us closer to the underlying factors in the situation. A study of the residence of delinquent and dependent boys and girls brought out a striking difference in proportion of delinquents and dependents from the different wards. The following table gives us a classification of children by sex and race according to residence in the various wards:

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²Miss Eleanor Myers, a student in the Department of Sociology in the University of Kansas, gave valuable assistance in the collection and tabulation of the data presented here.

TABLE I.

Number of Children Appearing in the Juvenile Court, Classified by Ward, Sex and Race, with Percentages of Delinquents and Dependents Based on Entire Juvenile Population.

Ward	Boys		Girls		Total	Number in age-group 5-16	Per cent of total no. of children in the city in age-group 5-16
	White	Colored	White	Colored			
I.	11	2	2 (1)	2	17 (1)	16	2.82
II.	2	2	0	0	4	4	0.82
III.	3	1	4	0	8	88	1.55
IV.	7 (2)	1	5 (1)	3	16 (3)	13	8.36
V.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
VI.	2	0	2 (1)	1 (1)	5 (2)	3	1.44
Transient	1		1		2	2	
Total	26 (2)	6	14 (3)	6 (1)	52 (6)	46	2.13

NOTE: Figures in parentheses indicate number of boys or girls in each group who were under five years of age.

The statistical method used here of computing the percentages of the delinquent juvenile groups upon the basis of the total population comprised in the juvenile group in question seemed to the writer to be the only fair method. By juvenile age group we mean the total number of children in the city of the ages from 5 to 16 years inclusive. By percentage number we denote the proportion of delinquents to the particular age group.

The groupings by sex and race show certain significant things. The colored boys lead in delinquency with a percentage number of 4.22, followed by the colored girls with a percentage number of 2.63, followed by the white boys with a percentage number of 2.59, with the white girls last with a percentage number of 1.24. As indicated here the difference between the sexes is somewhat more striking than the difference between the races. As to sex, the percentage numbers are 2.78 for the boys, both colored and white, and 1.48 for the colored and white girls. For race, we have a percentage number of 1.92 in the case of the white children as compared with a percentage number of 3.28 for the colored boys and girls. These ratios indicate the favorable position of the white girl: she is relatively one-half as likely to find her way into the Juvenile Court as her brother or her colored girl neighbor.

More significant than color or sex was the question of residence. In the fourth ward, for example, one out of every twelve children five years and over but under seventeen years old, appeared before the Juvenile Judge. If this proportion should be maintained throughout a twelve-year period (corresponding to the life of the child from 5 to 16 years in the juvenile age-group), and if there were no "repeaters" during this time, one-half of all the children in the fourth ward would have appeared in the Juvenile Court. The fact that the pro-

portion of juvenile delinquents from this ward is more than three times as large as that from any other ward gives us a clue to the causes of the situation. The race factor is not the chief one, because three-fourths of the juvenile delinquents from this ward are white. Besides, the proportion of juvenile delinquency is low in the fifth and sixth wards where the proportion of negroes to whites is the highest in the city. The fundamental cause is the low grade home environment which tends to the demoralization of the child. The bad housing conditions of the city are concentrated in the fourth ward. Poverty is present in the homes and finds expression in the stunted growth and undernourished bodies of the school children from this ward. This is the one ward within the city which has within its borders no church, nor school, nor playground. The report of the health supervision of school children showed that only one-eighth of the pupils in the school attended by the children from this ward were vaccinated. The business street which forms its western boundary has a distracting and quite demoralizing influence upon the children. A study of these facts demonstrates the necessity for conscious community action to save the child. Would the supervised playground here as in the city be the social prophylactic for juvenile delinquency?

A comparison of conditions in the fourth ward with wards five and six exhibits the influence of geography upon child development. The economic condition of the inhabitants of these wards differs but little from the ward studied above. Indeed, the proportion of negroes is greater here. Yet the fifth and sixth wards have an extremely low juvenile delinquency rate. Two geographical factors enter into this result.

The first one is the semi-rural character of the dwellings in these wards as compared with the housing in the fourth ward. The second geographical fact is the difference in proximity to the business street.

In the rural settlement north of the river the life of the child is not distracted by the "call of the street." He is still responsive to the "call of the wild" in a situation where impulsive response does not lead to juvenile delinquency. The excess then of juvenile delinquency in the fourth ward appears to be due to the play impulse gone wrong because of the difference, not in the children, but in the geographical location.

A study of residence revealed the influence of the home, the neighborhood and the geographic environment. An analysis of the nature of the delinquency enables us to obtain a clear insight into the difficulties in the situation. The following table offers us this opportunity:

TABLE II.

Cause of Appearance in the Juvenile Court.		
	Boys	Girls
Dependent and Neglected	6	13
Theft	11	0
Incorrigible and Immoral	2	6
Disturbing the Peace	6	1
Trespassing	4	0
Defacing Property	2	0
Cigarette Smoking	1	0
	<hr/> 32	<hr/> 20

This table exhibits the influence of sex differences in the child's adaptation to the community. Dependency and neglect appear to account for the presence of two-thirds of the girls in the Juvenile Court. The remaining third of the girls, where the complaint is incorrigibility or immorality constitute a more serious problem. But how different is the situation with the boys! Only one-fifth are dependent or neglected, while three-fourths of them are charged with undesirable motor activity, such as offenses against property and the like. This study shows the need of organized recreation to direct the activity of the boy. Otherwise the active life of the boy is likely to develop those vagrant and lawless tendencies which lead into the Juvenile Court, thence to the Boys' Industrial School and perhaps finally to the State Reformatory and Penitentiary. The small community needs a playground as much as a large city.

The work of the Juvenile Court as an institution, however, can be fairly studied only in the disposition of cases and the life-history of its wards. The wisdom of the Juvenile Judge has been shown in the fact that only twelve of the fifty-two individuals have been sentenced to the State Industrial School, and in the case of three of these sentence was suspended. Six children have been sent to the children's home and five have been adopted. The remainder have been put on probation. Experience has taught the judge of this court that the boy or girl should be sent to the state industrial schools only as a last resort.

In counties containing but small population, the Juvenile Court functions under grave limitations. The Juvenile Judge is elected as Probate Judge and the work of the Juvenile Court tends to become a by-activity with him both in office and when running for office. Then, too, the Juvenile Judge in the rural county faces conditions similar to those in the city, but without adequate means for meeting them. For example, in the small as well as the large community, a close correlation exists in a large proportion of the cases between feeble-mindedness and juvenile delinquency. But in the town and village there are no facilities for mental examination and no ungraded rooms in the pub-

lic school for the mentally deficient. The compensation for the probation officer is so inadequate that only incompetent service is likely to be secured.

The problems of juvenile delinquency, then, in the town or small city appear to be as real and pressing as those of the large city. The agencies, transplanted from the large community, have, however, not as yet become adapted to the changed environment. The situation challenges the attention, interest and effort of the friends of the child. We need a constructive program for the promotion of the welfare of children in our smaller as well as in our larger communities.